DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 476 008 RC 024 040

AUTHOR	Pino, Frank
TITLE	A Pilot Project To Include Culture in the Spanish Business Language Curriculum for Heritage Speakers.
PUB DATE	2001-02-00
NOTE	20p.; In: 2001 Monograph Series, Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the National Association of African American Studies, the National Association of Hispanic and Latino Studies, the National Association of Native American Studies, and the International Association of Asian Studies (Houston, TX, February 12-17, 2001).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Business Education; Courses; *Cross Cultural Training; *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Education; Experiential Learning; Higher Education; Internet; Language Skills; *Spanish; *Technology Uses in Education
IDENTIFIERS	University of Texas San Antonio

ABSTRACT

The Spanish-speaking population is the third-largest language group worldwide, hence Spanish and Hispanic cultures are of major interest in the business sector. At the University of Texas, San Antonio, a course in "Spanish for Special Purposes: Business" integrates culture into the curriculum. Most students taking the course are Spanish-speaking, but their fluency varies greatly and their familiarity with Hispanic cultures generally revolves around Mexico. The course is theme-based and student-centered, utilizing small-group work, peer teaching, student projects, and alternative assessments. In one activity, students work with the country reports prepared by the U.S. Department of State, which provide excellent information on the demography, history, and economy of each country. In another activity, students design a business and develop a complete business plan for it in Spanish as both a written product and an oral presentation. Students are encouraged to discuss cultural elements of their business and to make it international in scope. Special projects using the Internet have been developed. In one such project, students find a business on the Internet and develop a complete business plan for it, which is presented in written and oral format. Another project requires students to research a city in Spain and create materials to sell its attractions around the world. Student report that the real-life orientation is valuable and increases the appeal of the class. (Contains 24 references) (TD)

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ED 476 008

A Pilot Project to Include Culture in the Spanish Business Language Curriculum for Heritage Speakers

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The Interest and the Need: What the Literature Tells Us

The Spanish language and Hispanic cultures are of major interest in the world of business today. At institutions such as the famed Thunderbird School of International Management researchers are looking at how to incorporate cultural awareness along with the acquisition and application of linguistic skills, with foci ranging from effective translation (Rivers-Mills, 1999) to dealing with stereotypes (Carney, 1999) or cross-cultural persuasion strategies (Chin-Sook, 2000). A survey of current news articles underlines this emphasis (Kraul, 2000; Joyce, 2000; Brunks, 2001; Smith, 2001;Bixler, 2000; Woodard, 2000); knowledge of the Spanish language and Hispanic cultures is important to successful businesses. Presently the native Spanish-speaking population is the third largest group worldwide, after Mandarin and Hindi and ahead of English. More surprising is the fact that the United States is the second-largest Spanish-speaking country. The second-largest assemblage of Spanish-speakers lives

in this country, a statistic that is doubt foremost in the minds of U.S. business leaders (Doyle, Fryer, Cere, 2001).

The emphasis in the business sector on languages and cultures has for some time produced a corresponding emphasis in academia. Institutions have been offering both credit and non-credit courses dedicated to these areas of study (Finel-Honigman, 1986; Normand, 1986), serving students and communities with languages for special purposes and cultural awareness; and they have struggled to acquire the necessary resources to support these programs of study (Fairchild, 1986). In addition, state and national studies have been highlighting the need to attend intensively to this area (Hoegl, 1986). Effective techniques for accomplishing these purposes have been of significant interest for a long time (Reyes, 1988; Pino, 19). Delivery systems have been addressed, and content-based instruction has been important among them (Leaver, Stryker, 1989; Allen, Anderson, Narvaez, 1992). Area studies and language/cultural studies across the curriculum have also been implemented (Sternfield, 1989; Corson, 1989). Curricula for these purposes have evolved. Even though the early focus of how to write a business letter is still included (Watts, 1993), the curriculum has progressed far beyond this old staple to include a

variety of significant topics and approaches. Researching foreign businesses via their own self-presentation and in the language has become an important part of such instruction (Meyer, 1995). Numerous surveys of needs as perceived by business have been conducted over the years (Saito, 1995; Agruma, Hardy, 1997), and their results are widely circulated and studied, as well as incorporated into program structure and offerings. Indeed, even textbooks have changed, and the best of the newer ones incorporate a wide variety of aspects of business practice and types of businesses, from both cultural and linguistic perspectives (Doyle, Fryer, Cere).

A Pilot Project to Infuse a Spanish Business Course with Cultural Studies

At the author's institution students have the option of taking up to six hours of business Spanish, and the courses are very popular. The course is optional for Spanish majors but is populated primarily by non-majors, students coming from every area of the university. While Spanish for Special Purposes: Business has been offered occasionally at the lower level, the six hours of regularly offered possibilities are at the upper level. Most of the students in

upper-level Spanish are Hispanic, and many of them are heritage speakers of the language. Their background in the language varies widely, however; and some are very fluent, while others are less so. Their background in the culture varies widely as well; however, few are broadly conversant with the Hispanic world in general. Students' background or experiences generally revolve around Mexico. Thus students need to learn about the cultures of many other Spanish-speaking countries. In structuring and restructuring the course over a period of years, the author has taken it through a variety of incarnations. However, in recent years he has piloted the infusion of ever-greater quantities of cultural materials via the utilization of emerging technologies.

Course Structure

The author generally teaches the course and uses *Exito comercial* as the text. Classes are usually around twenty-five students, and the course comprises a four-skills plus culture approach. The author bases his approaches on the five Cs of language study: communication, culture, connections, comparisons, and communities. Communication is subdivided to include interpretive, interactional and presentational opportunities

for students. Culture is likewise subdivided to include the three Ps of culture study: products, practices and perspectives and their intersections. In keeping with the recommendations to be found in the literature, the course is also somewhat content-based and/or theme-based, communicative in nature, and student-centered. Alternative assessment is used, such that in addition to more traditional tests students prepare and present projects and develop and present portfolios. Rubrics are generally used for all types of assessment other than the tests, and students become familiar with these early in the semester. Extensive pair work and small-group work are utilized, involving such techniques as jigsaws and peer teaching and peer editing.

Some Key Activities

An initial activity in the course involves awareness of the Spanish-speaking world. In addition to working with text materials, students also work with the country reports prepared by the U. S. Department of State, which provide excellent information on a variety of aspects of the demographics, history and economy of each country. Students are able to use this material to prepare and present reports; and as a key element in this and other facets of

the course, students are held responsible for material presented by one another. There are recaps in class to highlight information presented by pairs, groups and individuals so that each student can be generally aware of the most significant information and conceptual understandings that should be emphasized.

Another format the author uses is that of having each student design a business they would like to create and head and develop a complete business plan for it in Spanish as both a written product and an oral presentation. Students are encouraged to discuss cultural elements of their business and to make it international in scope. They can research their idea and do a sort of feasibility study through a variety of means, including on the Internet. They are welcome to consult peers and peer edit to assist each other. During the presentations they respond to the elements of the business described and discuss its likely success, including in a particular cultural context.

During all phases of the course students are required to maintain vocabulary journals in which they are to note in context items that are new to them. There are also recaps of vocabulary general to most of the group; and new items are part of the assessment system, both in testing and in the expectation that

students will use some new vocabulary in their projects and presentations.

Throughout the above and other activity formats, students are engaging in all the Cs. They certainly practice communication in all its facets, and culture and comparisons are an integral part of working with the country reports. To some extent the material in the text and in the country reports provides connections to other disciplines as well. While these materials provide ample opportunity to deal with products and practices, some of the subsequent formats also provide many possibilities for working with communities.

Integrating Technology

For the integration of culture, modern technology affords some exceedingly worthwhile opportunities. The author has developed a number of Internet projects with his students that have allowed them to participate in very beneficial cultural explorations. Initially he works with the students to orient them to appropriate search engines and in particular encourages them to work with the LANIC system, the Latin American Network Information Center of the University of Texas at Austin, lanic@utexas.edu. Through

this and other systems the students are able to access a wealth of information about Spain and Latin America and Hispanic cultures in general. At entry level students are able to read and report on a variety of topics from myriad newspapers and are able to do comparisons with United States culture and interpretation of events and among the various *latino* cultures. This type of exploration also constitutes exploration of communities for them and provides excellent chances to compare perspectives, that more elusive and difficult area of culture to investigate.

In addition the author has developed a number of special projects using the Internet for cultural investigation. In one such format students are to find a business on the Internet and develop a complete business plan for it, based on the information they find there about it. This business, too, they are to present in written form and as an oral presentation; and it, too, they are to consider in its cultural context. They are asked to scan and include images as well as text, taking full advantage of all the cultural elements that the World Wide Web offers.

Certainly students are already exploring communities and culture by doing this research and by completing the project. They are also constructing an aggregate vision of the business world of

the country or countries in question. The instructor can have the students focus all their research on a particular country or region of a country or of Latin America, if desired. In that way he/she can ensure that students add to their areas of knowledge about the Spanish-speaking cultures rather than continue to work in only one area throughout their academic careers.

An additional format that has proved especially successful at the author's institution in related to its new program in tourism management. Of great interest to many individuals in the university in a city for which tourism is of major importance, the activity attracts many students who are not majoring in tourism management but can see themselves as nevertheless potentially working in that industry or a related one at some point in their careers. The project calls for students to pick a city and become a Destination Management Corporation for that city. As he has utilized the project so far, students have been asked to choose cities in Spain, as this is an area of the world about which they generally know less until they complete this project. They learn all they can about the city and create materials to sell its attractions around the world. Certainly they will already find some such materials on the Internet, but they may at most adapt, not copy. They are to create

new materials, but may include existing images from the city's website. They are also asked to prepare an oral presentation as if to a Familiarization Tour Group to sell the virtues of the city as a tourist destination to tour operators who would conceivably bring groups there. Once again peer consultation and editing may be used as part of the preparation process.

A variation on the model of having all students report individually to the class is to have students present within small groups. Then a jigsaw approach may be used in which students are reassigned to new groups comprised of one person from each of the previous groups. In that case each member of the new groups must present in capsule each of the businesses that was presented in his/her original group. In this way students receive some more extemporaneous speaking practice and truly build that aggregate picture of the business scene in the country in question. This format is especially helpful in very large classes where individual reports are not feasible.

Student Reactions

Students generally react very favorably to these formats, finding them appealing for a variety of reasons. Their real-life

orientation seems valuable to the student and increases the appeal of the work for the class. The context that is provided for each project also facilitates a higher quality of work and a full integration of all skills and knowledge. They enjoy the learner-centered nature of this approach, and as generally more mature learners, truly welcome the opportunity learn from one another. They take more responsibility for their own learning and are not generally waiting for the instructor to provide everything for them. Since the assessment approach as thus far described builds heavily on the students' work, their efforts are fully validated.

Conclusions

In general the attempt to integrate more culture into the Spanish business course has been an unqualified success. The process is producing a high level of learning and a high quality of student output. In addition, student reaction is very positive, and their perception via formal feedback has been that the projects are worthwhile learning experiences. They feel that they grow in language skills of the sort that will help them in their future business careers, and also see themselves as more culture proficient. It is hoped and expected that future follow-up of

students who have actually gone out into the field will confirm these preliminary results. In the meantime the projects should certainly serve well in other settings and provide a model for consideration in other programs of Spanish for Business.

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2001 MONOGRAPH SERIES

FEBRUARY 12-17, 2001
HOUSTON, TEXAS

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2001

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